

CHATTISGARH

AND

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

SHANKAR GUHA NIYOGI

SHAHEED SHANKAR GUHA NIYOGI

YADGAR SAMITI

LOK SAHITYA PARISHAD

First published in early eighties.

Reprint : October 28, 1991

Support Price : Rupees Two Only.

Publisher : Lok Sahitya Parishad
C/o. Chattisgarh Mukti Morcha
C M.S S Office
Dalli-Rajhara
Durg (M. P.) 491228

Printer : Vijay Printing Press
Balod, (Durg) M. P.

CHATTISGARH AND THE NATIONAL QUESTION

The Land and the People :

The borders of the Chattisgarh in the state of Madhya Pradesh extend from latitude 18 degrees to 24 degrees and longitude 80 degrees to 84 degrees. Its area is 52,650 square miles. The population is about one crore and 25 lakhs. Included within the borders of the Chattisgarh are seven districts : Raipur, Durg, Bilaspur, Bastar, Sarguja, Raigarh and Rajnandgaon. In ancient times this area was known as Dakshin Koshal and also by various other names such as Ratanpur Raj, Dandakaranya, Gondwana etc. According to historical sources, the use of the name 'Chattisgarh' is encountered for the first time in the works of a folk poet in the year 1487 A.D.

Geographically, Chattisgarh is divided into two regions: plain Chattisgarh and hilly Chattisgarh.

Chattisgarh is an area bountifully endowed by nature. Large areas of land is suitable for rice cultivation. Hidden in the earth are enormous mineral deposits of Iron ore, Coal, Lime Stone, Dolomite, Quartzite, Copper, Uranium, Tin, Bauxite, Felspar, Manganese and other ores. There are also rich forest resources of Teak, Sal, Mahua, Tendu, Saja, Bija and other useful Timber trees. In the rivers Sheonath, Mahanadi and Arpa, water flows all through the year.

Chattisgarh is a large area in which, through time, a people with a distinct identity have been negotiating the highways and by-ways of history. Although these people speak a number of different languages, they possess a special culture

and loyalty which inspires them to devote themselves to the development of the region and its peoples. For long ages the people here have been tied to a feudal economic order. The special economic life of the adivasis of this region—primitive communism—has almost become extinct under pressure from this feudal order.

Some examples of the traditional agriculture and industries of Chattisgarh are ;

1. **Wood Carvings :** The beautifully carved wooden sculptures of this region testify to the advanced artistry of the wood carvers.
2. Even today one can see scattered deposits of slag which give evidence of the advanced metallurgy practised in this region. The smelters of iron are an adivasi group called “Agherias”.
3. “Kosta” group of people used to make cloth.
4. “Kalar” caste used to make alcoholic drinks from the Mahua flower.
5. Small mountain streams were dammed and the water used for agriculture in accordance with the ancient techniques.
6. The practice of “Gota” was prevalent in agriculture; according to this, the entire community joined in tilling one person’s fields; in return the owner of the land fed the entire community with non-vegetarian meal on that day.
7. Joint hunting expeditions took place and the spoils divided equally among all the participants. Even the dogs got their shares.
8. Ioc was produced on the Palash trees.
9. The Kosa insects yielded silk, from which silk cloth was produced.

10. Pulses and oilseeds were produced in large quantities.

Chattisgarhi society was rich in artistic and musical expression. On occasions of marriages, festivals and on other occasions such as moonlit nights, the Chattisgarhi people joined together in beautiful choral songs. Chattisgarhi men and women celebrate their moments of happiness through various dances such as Sua, Rilo, Biha, Phag etc. Village gods, as well as certain common deities such as Budha Deo, Danteswari, Kankalin and Mahamaya are worshipped in the Chattisgarhi fashion. Kalchuri, Rajbans, and subsequently the Marathas and finally the English have ruled in Chattisgarh. Till 1947 the area was governed through various small feudal lords such as the kingdoms of Bastar, Rajnandgaon, Lohara, Raipur, Rattanpur, Bilaspur etc. These kingdoms fostered and influenced the people's life with the distinct cultural contributions. Brahminic culture is found only in the government administration, but in the rural culture the elected 'baigas' are predominant.

The languages and dialects spoken in Chattisgarh are mainly Chattisgarhi, Halbi, Gondi, and Oraon. In addition, Maria etc. are also spoken by a few people. In the towns Hindi is the medium of communication.

Under the British rule there was only a cotton mill at Rajnandgaon and one jute mill at Raigarh. Since independence, based on soviet and other foreign capital, numerous large industries have been established among which are the Bhilai Steel Plant, the Korba Aluminium Plant, Thermal Power Plants and Cement Plants etc.

The Social and Economic Status of Chattisgarh –

In spite of the presence of enormous resources of minerals, forests and fertile land, the people of Chattisgarh are very poor. For lakhs of people, the prospect of two

square meals a day remains a distant dream. Malnutrition, lack of education and ill health are rampant everywhere. From an economic and social point of view, the people of Chattisgarh may be divided into three groups:-

1. People living in newly developed urban areas surrounding modern industrial complexes.
2. Adivasi settlements scattered amidst the mountains and forests.
3. The plains: agricultural areas.

- 1) Industrial Area: Surrounding the giant modern industrial complexes established on the basis of foreign capital (public sector) and some big Indian capital (private sector) a new type of urban civilisation has developed. These urban conglomerations can be divided into 2 areas:
 - a) Urban areas provided with all modern amenities and
 - b) Urban slums.

Among these modern industrial complexes of Chattisgarh are the steel city of Bhilai, the Aluminium city of Korba, the cement city of Jamul, Akaltara, Mandhar etc., as well as the so-called cultural capital of Chattisgarh, Raipur. Of the people living in these cities, 90% are from different states of India while 10% are original residents of Chattisgarh. Among those who live in the slums of the city, alongwith Chattisgarhis live emigrant labourers from the neighbouring states of Orissa, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

- 2) People living in Settlements scattered among the mountains and jungles are mainly adivasis. Among these, 10% are landless, 75% small peasants, 12% middle peasants and 3% rich peasants. The fertility of land is poor.

- 3) In the plain areas, Kurmis, Kalars, Telis, Adivasis and Harijans live. Among these 30% are landless, 40% small peasants, 20% middle peasants, rich peasants 8% and absentee landlords 2%. The fertility of the land is medium to excellent. Only 12% of the cultivated area is irrigated.

Among the business class, the majority of people are from outside Chattisgarh. In the villages, Marwaris have money - lending businesses, while in the urban areas, Punjabis are the usurers.

Among the sources of employment, Adivasis and other poor people work in the mines. But in recent times, mechanisation on the basis of capital and machinery supplied by "Socialist" Soviet Union is proceeding at a rapid pace, reducing the employment prospects for the poor.

The Present Status of Madhya Pradesh and the Demand for Small States:

The Madhya Pradesh of today is an unnatural creation of state power, designed to control and administer the regional entities of the Malvi, Bundeli, Bagheli and Chattisgarhi nationalities. This is why in the fields of democratic process, administration, agricultural developments, the distribution of agricultural produce, the development of rural industry, the proper utilisation of the labour power of the people, scientific planning and alround progress, education, health and cultural developments the existing state power has proved it-self to be a conspicuous failure. In the semi-feudal, semi-colonial mode of exercise of state power the only object of the state machinery is to cow down the people by enforcing draconian laws. So, instead of state boundaries being determined through natural political processes, they are artificially created in order to suit the administrative convenience of state power. Thus, states such as

Meghalaya, Arunachal, Manipur and Haryana are created to suit administrative requirements; conversely, the demands for states such as Chattisgarh, Telengana, Jharkhand etc. are rejected since they are unsuited to the convenience of the same administration. As a result, the people are trapped in a feudal and semi-feudal political structure and production relation. The purchasing power in the rural areas gradually decreases and people have to face famine after famine. The hungry populace quietly await their death, in utter hopelessness. Nevertheless, in the place of a silent populace the government keeps singing the songs of progress.

The Demand for a New Chattisgarh State is a Popular Democratic Demand :

The people want that the Chattisgarh region should develop. It is by no means in the present political structure, that the creation of small states will automatically cure all the present ills. Nevertheless, when the vast majority of a nationality group feel that the creation of a smaller state on the basis of a distinct identity will enable them to participate actively in contributing to the national progress, and facilitate the appropriate and planned utilisation of the natural resources, and when they are ready jointly to work towards this goal, then the fulfillment of this demand becomes a democratic right of the people. This democratic right must be granted. Today the Chattisgarh bourgeois and petty-bourgeois are becoming increasingly devoted to and enthusiastic about the idea of a Chattisgarh state. Among the peasantry too, the idea that they should be granted a state of their own is becoming increasingly strong. Hence, it is the duty of the working class to participate actively in this question, Unless the campaign is guided in a definite direction and linked up with the question of the struggles for people's liberation, it may be diverted into the wrong channels; militant Chauvinism can harm this whole campaign.

In India the question of nationality has always been viewed from the point of view of the British imperialists. When what we call the freedom struggle transcended the limited interests of the comprador bourgeoisie and the capitalists and become related to the long term people's struggle for social liberation, the imperialists panicked. Their question was "Is there any such entity as the Indian nation? Can this people living scattered over a land area of sub-continental proportions, divided by innumerable walls of race, language, society and culture ever be united into a single nation? it is not true that the only unity in India is a false unity imposed artificially by the British administration?" In 1888, Sir John Strachy had gravely declared. "There is no such thing as India nor will there ever be." (India : its administration and progress.)

Sir John Sealey tells us, in "The expansion of England" "The idea of regarding India as a nation is based on the kind of fundamental misconception that political science tries to dispel. The name India does not refer to any political entity, but like the terms Europe and Africa, has a purely Geographical connotation. It is not co-extensive with any national or linguistic group but contains many nations and language groups".

In 1930, the reports of the Simon Commission dwelt upon the heterogeneity of the Indian people, and on this basis had cast doubts upon the fundamental issues of the Indian freedom struggle. In these reports the national struggle was referred to in these terms: "The huge population of India is influenced by the wishes of a small section of the people" In this "huge population" referring to the presence of 222 languages, the basic opposition of Hindu and muslim interests", etc a picture is painted of a colourful panorama of a conglomeration of races and religions. Churchill had claimed that if the English left India, the air would be filled with the screams and noise of murders and

other disturbances. The British imperialists had opposed the Indian freedom struggle on the basis of the presence of different national identities.

In reply to this, our bourgeois leaders laid stress on an emotional and idealistic unity. Tagore addressed a "great" unity amidst diversity" (vividher majhey milano mohan) and claimed that all the races were united in a single body (shak hum dal, pataan mogal, akdehe holo leen). Some bourgeois leaders were influenced by the claims of the imperialists, examples being Surendernath Banerji and Motilal Nehru.

At this time, the bourgeois leaders were unable to give a scientific content to the concept of the underlying unity of the distinct cultural identities of the Indian nation. Or perhaps this was deliberately suppressed. Some communists, on the basis of the 1921 census report, stressed that class interests were the only genuine basis for national unity. For instance, they pointed out that in Jamshedpur, where work takes place under modern conditions of production all races and nationalities work together, and no one paid attention to the national or racial identity of the person working beside him. By stressing only the class angle, they neglected the predominance of an agricultural economy in India, and of the nature of the consciousness of the Indian peasantry. While the class angle may be applicable in Jamshedpur, the tribals of south Bihar give greater importance to the Jharkhand question. It is ironical, in this context, to note that it was the same Jamshedpur that was the scene, recently, of wide spread communal disturbances.

The State Power, Even today is Repeating the words of Churchill :

Diverting the people with the mirage of stable government, the alternative of instability that is held up before the people, reflects the conclusions of the Simon Commission. The appeal to strengthen the hand of the central power,

reminds us of Churchill's threat that the withdrawal of imperialist forces would fill the air with the screams of the dying. Is the unity of India even today, an artificial construction imposed by the centre? Will the slightest weakness on the part of the centre result in the Balkanization of the country? Where is the unity in diversity of Tagore? Occasional feeble cries are heard demanding more autonomy for the states. Even these cries are not backed up by any solid argument. The real problems are cleverly camouflaged. Why has everybody made a Guru out of the Simon commission on the question of national integrity? Why not admit the existence, of distinct, national identities, and give primacy to, indeed, harness the forces generated by the loyalty to national identity in order to tackle the wider questions of feudalism and colonialism.

The different national groups among the Indian people live in different parts of the huge geographical region. For national historical reasons the development of these national groups has occurred in an unequal manner. The people of some nation groups are very far advanced both economically and socially, whereas the people of other national groups are backward in all respects. Among the group, the status, of the Harijans and Adivasis is far worse even than the average in Chattisgarh, the people of the Adivasi and Harijan groups constitute 60 to 65% of the population. For these reasons, on the average, Chattisgarh is an extremely backward area, as has already been brought out earlier.

The people of Chattisgarh will have to be conceded the right to govern themselves :

According to the teaching of Stalin, each national group has the right to shape its future according to the wishes of its people.

In Chattisgarh, in the near future, the struggle for the right of national group to govern itself will proceed apace. This is because the enormous Chattisghari population is dependent on agriculture, and the peasantry, especi-

ally the Adivasi peasantry, are particularly oppressed and exploited. Because the land question is intimately connected with the national question and with this campaign, the peasantry will fight this battle with all their might, this prediction is borne out by our past historical experience. Hence, the working class will also join this battle, in their aid. The national bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie, if for nothing else then because it is in their interest the purchasing power of the peasantry, will join this campaign, or at least not oppose it.

2. The working class in Chattisgarh, with the experience of having successfully conducted numerous struggles, is in a position to lead this campaign. Our red-green flag, is very well regarded among the adivasi peasantry. Hence this leadership will carry much weight.
3. The slogan of the Anandmargis and the Zemindars, "Chattisgarh for the Chattisarihs" has proved ineffective. In this campaign, one national group will not fight against another national group.
4. People from different classes will unit on the basis of their respective class interests and class consciousness. Hence there will be peace among the nation groups, while the struggle continues in order to secure the intrests of the different groups.
5. This campaign will incorporate the programmes of revolutionary trade union activities, boycott of alcoholism, the peasant and land questions, the question of the price of forest produce the question of educational and health services, struggles against every type of opperession, especially against the opperession of women. Since the working class will see that these struggles have been in their own interest hence, not

only will the working class join the movement, but will provide it with selfless leadership.

Today the reasons for the backwardness of Chattisgarh are :

1. The super imposed economic relations and mechanisation of the colonial powers.
2. Feudal village economy.
3. Low productivity of land.

A) We cannot jump from feudalism to socialism. We can only begin a process of change over to socialism while passing through a process of capitalism. But keeping the lessons of history in view this process will have to be undertaken with great care in the rural areas under the leadership of the working class.

B) The working class will not remain content with this and will proceed one step ahead and form cooperative societies (not on the pattern of the present societies) and other such institutions and rapidly proceed towards a socialist economy and society.

C) In this campaign for national identity, the proletariat will discover its allies and unitedly fight its enemies.

D) In order to prevent this campaign from degenerating into militant chauvinism the answer to the question "who is a Chattisgarhi" will have to be sought right in the beginning of the campaign and this answer will have to be kept constantly in view. Chattisgarhis are those who within the geographical area of Chattisgarh live their lives through honest toil, who are prepared to devote their lives to secure the free-

dom of the people of Chattisgarh, who neither economically nor in any other way conform to the scientific definition of the feudal class, who desire the end of capitalist relations, and who will not hinder the development of a democratic Chattisgarh and who feel brotherhood towards the proleterians of the world.

For the liberation of the proletariat, a revolution is an absolute historical necessity. For the other progressive elements as well, a revolution, in the form of a qualitative change in the social order is felt to be necessary. The struggle for national self determination is a step in the direction of this qualitative change.

How are we working in Chattisgarh ?

We are engaged in a struggle against the present social order. We want to achieve a qualitative change in this order. But what is our concept of the alternative ? Some comrades would say—the practical realisation of the alternative will come later, now just listen to my speech. We do not say this. We feel we can only achieve our objective through our active programmes. For this reason we search for an alternative in the process of carrying out every one of our programmes. The alternative to our present social order is a society under the leadership of the people, achieved in the course of people's democratic revolution. The struggle for national identity will help to identify and unite all progressive elements in this effort. The achievement of a genuine socialist order is the next step in this process.

हमार सपना के छत्तीसगढ़

जहां सब ला पीये के पानी मिलही,
जहां हर खेत में सिंचाई के साधन होही,
जहां हर हाथ ला काम मिलही,
जहां किसान ला पैदावार के सही कीमत मिलही,
जहां हर गांव में अस्पताल होही,
जहां हर लइका के सही पढ़ाई बर स्कूल होही,
जहां सब ला भुइयां अऊ घर मिलही,
जहां गरीबी, शोषण और पूंजीवाद नइ होही,

अइसन छत्तीसगढ़ कब बनही ?

जब किसान मजदूर के छत्तीसगढ़ में राज होही ।

अइसन छत्तीसगढ़ बनायबर संघर्षरत हावे,
छत्तीसगढ़ मुक्ति मोर्चा

हमारे देशप्रेम की पहचान...

हमारा छत्तीसगढ़

छोटा और सुन्दर राज्य छत्तीसगढ़

नये भारत के लिए नया छत्तीसगढ़

शोषण विहीन छत्तीसगढ़

हमारे सपनों का छत्तीसगढ़